

LC 112/a-2.1983

GERMANIC PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES

A Selective List of Reading Materials

Margrit Krewson

European Division • Library of Congress • Washington 1983



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INTRODUCTION

The year 1983 marks the tricentennial of the founding of Germantown, Pennsylvania. German immigration to what was to become the United States of America began on October 6, 1683, with the arrival there of thirteen Mennonite families from Krefeld, near Duesseldorf. For three centuries German-speaking immigrants have continued to come, in groups and as individuals, from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, indeed even from Russia. The influx has influenced profoundly the ethnic composition and the cultural outlook of America.

World War I was the catalyst for total assimilation of the Germans in America; but the amalgamating process had been well under way prior to the American declaration of war on Germany in 1917. After the turn of the century, the German language came to be used less and less despite efforts to halt its erosion. Nevertheless, the censuses indicate that by far the largest number of citizens living in the United States who spoke a foreign language as their mother tongue in 1950 and again in 1960 were the Germans. In 1970 there were still 4,891,000 persons whose native tongue was reported to be German.

By the end of the colonial period of American history the German element represented approximately ten percent of the overall population of the thirteen colonies. At the outbreak of the Revolution, the German population of the colonies consisted of approximately 225,000 people, the largest single ethnic group next to the British. During the Revolutionary War the German element became even larger with the arrival of German soldiers and officers who fought either on the British or the American side. The most famous of them was, of course, the Prussian Baron Friedrich von Steuben, who became Inspector General of Washington's army.

During the colonial period Germans came to American shores largely for religious or for economic reasons. In the mid-1900s political considerations became the chief cause of German immigration, especially for liberal and free-thinking political refugees after the unsuccessful Revolution of 1848. Among the German "Forty-eighters," the Rhenish Carl Schurz stands out as a particularly successful immigrant. He was a highly regarded journalist, a Senator from Missouri during Reconstruction, and Secretary of the Interior in the Hayes Administration.

In the post-Civil War era, however, Germans came to the United States not only because they were welcome, but because in many instances they were actually invited to contribute particular skills that were invaluable to an emerging industrial power. Engineers of German and Swiss descent, for instance, made a very important

contribution in the area of bridge and tunnel building. And German businessmen such as Adolphus Busch and his partner Eberhard Anheuser established thriving industries. Recent immigrants from German-speaking countries made their mark in these areas alongside native-born Americans such as John D. Rockefeller, whose ancestors had come from Germany in the eighteenth century.

German immigration has been not only the immigration of people and skills, but also the immigration of ideas. The first Bible published in the colonies in a European language was not in English but in German. German influence on the intellectual life of America began with the founding of German schools in the 18th century and culminated with the establishment of universities modeled along German lines in the latter part of the 19th century. The founding of Johns Hopkins University in 1876 was in essence the transplantation of a German university to American soil.

The influence of German culture, science, and art has remained strong in the twentieth century. Albert Einstein and Wernher von Braun, for instance, have had a major influence on American science and technology. And it would be difficult to imagine contemporary American music and architecture without the influence of the Austrians Arnold Schoenberg and Richard Neutra. Among writers who have made an impact on American society one need only mention H. L. Mencken, a second generation German-American, and the exiles Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht.

The works included in this bibliography reflect numerous facets of this long development. They deal, among other topics, with the beginnings, when William Penn sought to recruit the pious, hard-working, and often persecuted peasants of the Rhine region for life in the new colony of Pennsylvania. They are also concerned with the considerable impact of German-speaking immigrants on the Civil War era, and with the pronounced German flavor of such states as Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Because the literature on Germanic immigrants is vast, this list of sources had to be highly selective. It contains, however, several specialized bibliographies for use by those wishing more specific information about certain aspects of Germanic settlement and influence.

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